

QUESTIONS FROM THE PEW.

BY FRANKLIN N. JEWETT.

THE LAST JUDGMENT.

(Matt. xxv. 31-46.)

WE wish simply to notice a few points relative to this very familiar passage. It ostensibly portrays the events of the Last Great Day. It has presumably been so taken by the Christian Church in all ages. It seems to be very clear; "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left," etc. (Verses 31, 32.)

We understand that this was entirely in harmony with the Messianic expectations of the Jews. It is difficult to see how words could be more explicit. The time contemplated was that generally understood as of Christ's second coming. His first coming was in humiliation and suffering; his second coming was to be in glory and for judgment. The issue was to be final for weal or woe for all humanity. "And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life." Verse 46.

Our special inquiry has to do with the principle upon which the separation is made. The decision rests upon whether the persons affected have or have not fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, visited the sick, housed the stranger, and shown kindness to the unfortunates in prison.

In connection with this, and, as we submit, in contrast to it, we wish to call attention to the condition of salvation as presented by a later theology, and as, for the most part, proclaimed by the Church to-day. This condition also is most familiar; viz., faith in

Christ as one's saviour. This is very often held to coexist with a mystical union with him, which emphatically was the view of Paul. It has also very generally been held to require a belief in certain views concerning Christ, as his deity, and his vicarious, sacrificial atonement. Men's deeds are carefully declared to have no validity in the great determination of destiny. They may be worse than nothing, as affording a false ground for confidence. The righteousness of men is as "filthy rags." Not by works of righteousness which they have done are men to be justified, or pronounced acceptable in the Last Day, but by the blood of Christ, through their faith in him. Or, as regards merit, not because of *their* merit, but because of *his* merit. To inculcate conduct, the service of one's fellows, as determinative of destiny would be considered, and has been considered to be most pernicious. Yet this is exactly what Jesus did in the passage before us.

Here, we submit, is a difference, not of degree, but of kind. Jesus is just at the close of his ministry. He is giving an account of an event of unspeakable importance, in fact of the great incomparable Event. Here if ever, instruction should go to the root of the matter, and be safe to follow. Here if ever, mention should be made of what is fundamental. So one would think. But that upon which, according to the later theology, *all* depends, is not even *mentioned*. And not only that, but what the later theology carefully excluded, what preachers and theological writers have most insistently declared to be utterly worthless in the premises, is made determinative of the whole result. Can any one imagine Jesus as making such a presentation of the Last Judgment if he knew that its issues were to be decided as declared by the later theology? On this occasion he was speaking not only, or at all, to men in general, but to his disciples, who were soon to be his apostles. The end of his ministry was near. "And it came to pass when Jesus had finished all these words, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days the passover cometh, and the Son of man is delivered up to be crucified" (xxvi. 1, 2). Will any one claim that on such an occasion Jesus failed to call attention to what was essential, causative, fundamental, sufficient, and salutary to be taught as such; and that, instead, he directed attention, and the entire attention, to what was at best merely incidental or derivative, and in reality altogether worthless in determining the great result? How shall this matter be viewed?